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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses its attention on the evolving communes in many North American cities and their members. The purpose was to learn as much as possible about how people live under this one particular set of conditions, the criteria for success or failure of this life style, and the implications for society and the future. This is an impressionistic study, based on direct observation and interviews. In a period of five months, thirty urban communes were visited by at least one of the three authors. Twenty-two were located within the city limits of Toronto, the rest were in Berkeley, Montreal, and New York. Observation on several dimensions were presented. It was found that the majority of the members of the communes studied were of middle class origins, young, and relatively well educated. A number of conclusions are presented by the authors. Among these are that urban communes in their current form do not pose any threat to family life in America. (BW/Author)

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THE URBAN COMMUNE: FACT OR FAD, PROMISE OR PIPE DREAM

by

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The popular media have recently been focussing so much attention on the contemporary commune movement in North America that one could conceivably believe that communes have taken our society by storm and that a viable alternative to traditional life styles has finally been presented.[18] Most of the serious writings and studies in this area center on historical or minority group communes, communes in other countries, or on rural communes. The most recent writings, however, have been designed to sell rather than inform, describe rather than critically analyse.[1,8,11] Over the past few years a new form of commune has been evolving in many North American cities and virtually nothing has been written about these urban communes. We decided to focus our attention on this latter group and their members. We were interested in learning as much as we could about how people live under this one particular set of conditions, the criteria for success or failure of this life style, and the implications for our society and future.

This continent has been the scene of communal experiments as early as the 17th Century.[15] In 1870 John Noyes[17] (founder of the Oneida Community) completed his history of American socialist communities, concerned largely with Owenite and Fourierist Societies; he concluded that a common religious principle and prior acquaintance of the membership are essential to longevity. In 1875 Charles Nordhoff[16] gave a factual account of all the communities existent in 1874; he explored community as an alternative to unions which he felt taught members to regard themselves as "hirelings for life". He concluded that success depends upon unanimity and upon a feeling of oppression. Zablocki[24] analysed the Bruderhof Community, and probed the contemporary "hippie movement". He followed the rise of the present day communitarian movement from the use of drugs and the institution of the crash pad to the fostering of the psychological experience of communion. The crash pad experience, he feels, provides the first taste of communal living while drugs can provide a functional equivalent to religious experience. He concludes that some progression of absolute anarchism to either acontractual or consensual form of organization must take place if the commune is not to dissolve in chaos. Post

mortem accounts of rural communes of the 1960's are given by Gordon Yaswen[23] of Sunrise Hill, Mass., and Joyce Gardner[5] of Cold Mountain, N.Y.. Grierson[6] chronicles and analyses the formation and the one year's existence of an urban commune, emphasizing the evolution of structure within initially unstructured groups; group friction necessitates organization, he concludes. Yaswen calls for "love beyond reason" in the commune. Rosabeth Kanter [9,10] studies 19th Century American communities comparing 21 that lasted with 9 that failed, and later comparing 20 contemporary communes with successful 19th century utopias. She divided contemporary efforts into small anarchistic groups and growth-learning communities. She concludes that the former may meet its members' needs for a temporary home and family but that the latter is necessary for those who want a rooted way of life in a community. Ron Roberts'[19] focus is the contemporary commune although he traces the roots of collective heritage in early America. He concludes that failure is usually related to one of four issues: lack of leadership, lack of means of handling internal disputes, lack of ideology, or external repression. The state and problems of contemporary urban communes are dealt with by David French[4] and Steven Roberts [20]. French saw the urban community largely bound together by its negativism resulting from basic attitudes borrowed from the "straight" world. Roberts reports on urban communal experiments where he feels that "rhetoric is being put into practice".

PROCEDURE

This is an impressionistic study, based on direct observation and interviews. In a period of five months, thirty urban communes were visited by at least one of the three authors. Twenty-two were located within the city limits of Toronto, the rest in Berkeley, Montreal and New York. Our arbitrary definition of an urban commune includes the following criteria (Table I): at least six (adult) members, non-consanguineous, of both sexes, living at the same city address, under one roof, at least six months in existance with a significant extent of sharing of material, child rearing, food, and space. There are obviously other ways which we could have chosen to define the urban commune, and there are other facets of communal living not explicitly included in our

criteria. In the majority of cases two or more of the members of each commune were interviewed intensively. At times the authors(s) took part in group meetings and meals in the commune. The interview itself was free-wheeling but somewhat structured in that we wanted to collect as much basic demographic, sociological and psychological data as we could (see below). We based our paper on our interviews and experiences with those specifically studied. There were no attempts to study comparable individuals not living communally, no inclusion of rural or separate-dwelling communes, and no concerted search for homogeneous communes. Because of our methods we obviously did not get a representative or random sample of all existing urban communes. We restricted ourselves to the definitive criteria we set up but even within these restrictions there was wide variation among the communes visited.

OBSERVATIONS

The vast majority of the members of the urban communes we studied were either of middle class origins. (Table II). 85% of the individuals had completed high school, and many at least a part of their university education (55%) before beginning their communal experience. Even if we discount the five American communes and the three so-called draft dodger communes, a disproportionate number of our communalists were United States citizens - just under half of the members of the Canadian urban communes were of recent American origin. Most of the members came from Protestant homes (fewer from Catholic), and a relatively large number of Jewish individuals are involved in the communal movement (one-fifth of our sample). The thirty communes studied averaged about 10 members, usually composed of one or two couples, some singles, and a number of children. They ranged from a low of six members to a high of twenty-five communalists living together under one roof. About 55% of the adults were male. The great majority of the communes in the city were situated in large old houses in the downtown area, in the general vicinity of the University (all four cities). In most of these homes the individual couples or singles had their own bedrooms (see below). Most (70%) of the communalists studied were in their twenties, with exceptions in both directions; the contemporary communal movement is obviously a young peoples' phenomenon. In fact,

except for the presence of children (usually of preschool age) there was virtually no intergenerational cohabitation. The average age of the communes investigated was over a year; the "youngest" being eight months, and a number (5) existing three years or more. There were wide differences in the reasons offered for joining the communes, but a number of themes appeared to predominate, and often more than one resided in the same individual (Table III). The commonest (conscious) motivating rationales were either political-economic (hatred of the system, anticapitalism, socialist committment, women's lib. draft dodger), financial (save money, monetary co-op), social (companion-ship, nurturance), personal (failure or pressures on nuclear family), self-actualization (learn about self, solve personal problems, improve relationships with others), religious (Yoga Asram, Christian, Process), experiential (good trip, curiosity, try sharing new life style), or common task business or service. Four evolved from a group of people working closely together in a store or in a youth drop-in centre, for example.

Although sharing and cooperation are basic elements in the communal life style, it soon became apparent that the extent of communality varied considerably between the various communes. As far as domestic tasks are concerned, the division of labour was in most (70%) situations rotated on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The two major variations on this theme were (a) total laissez-faire, with members cleaning up etc. as the mood or need struck them, and (b) relatively permanently assigned duties depending on one's needs, interests, talents, availability and rotated only as boredom or necessity dictated. In general, the most organized in this respect (and others) seemed to operate much more smoothly. One of the two tasks that were least rotated in the various houses was cooking - even in the constantly rotating schemata a relatively stable cooking arrangement evolved, involving one or two people in many cases. The tasks that were rotated included cleaning various rooms, dishes, setting the table, garbage disposal, repairs, and the like. The other relatively permanent assignment was bookkeeping, handling the finances, expenses, savings and records. The different financial arrangements were all variations on a theme. Each member of the commune was expected to contribute his (her) share for room and board, upkeep. Some

(20%) communes demanded total sharing of remuneration and assets, while others asked each member to put in an equal amount which ranged from a low of around $60/month/person to a high of $75/week. In a few communes (10%) there was an actual buying of shares in a corporation or house which formalized the membership contract. In some (70%) of the communes the members had a variety of jobs, while in others (30%) the members were all supported by the commune business (leather shop, day care centre, health food store, hip shop, crafts). The jobs held by different members reflected their varied skills if they were into the work scene (social workers, professors, medical students, radio producers, teachers, lawyers), or conversely indicated a rejection of middle class upward mobility and elitism (drivers, pamphlet distributors, waitresses, welfare recipients). The communal money was used in different ways: food, rent, utilities, were in the almost all cases paid for out of the central pool, but entertainment, clothes, personal accessories were only bought by the communal bank in a few instances. At times money was used to rent a TV, buy furniture, or even hire a cleaning lady. Arguments and discussions about the share and disposition of moneys contributed by individuals were not infrequent. The issue of food and meals was a surprisingly emotionally-laden one. Although there were many vegetarians and health food devotees among the communalists, there were often individuals with particular idiosyncrasies and preferences; preparing common and universally acceptable meals was a problem at times. Past experiences and tastes, or the amounts eaten by individual members were occasionally foci for heated discussions. These types of issues tended to drag the mood of the house down whenever meetings dwelt on them. In general,however, mealtime often served as group meetings for social, administrative, or personal reasons; they were often pleasurable, constructive, nurturant, even at times joyous. This made the exceptions even more noteworthy and a clear manifestation of trouble brewing. In a couple of the communes totally individually bought and prepared meals was the order of the day, and this appeared to be indicative of an unhealthy atmosphere - demise seemed imminent. There was frequent borrowing and interchaning of clothes in

most of the communes, but only a few (the most radical) was there joint ownership of all clothes. In these communes, clothes were bought via an individual allowance from the communal money; in the majority, members bought their own clothes and personal effects with their retained income. Another vital issue was space utilization and privacy. The most serious and stable of the urban communes ensured the opportunities for members to obtain total privacy. This occasionally evolved gradually from a laissez-faire or even anti-privacy attitude to one with built in safeguards protecting that need. When space and privacy were infringed upon by people, noise or mess, inevitable and exaggerated problems arose: pettiness, stubborness over seemingly inconsequential issues frequently prevailed.

Sexuality was another area that played an important role in group alignments, discussions, arguments, and communal stability. Most (70%) of the thirty communes were composed of couples and singles with little sexual activity among the members. There were exceptions, however, ranging from a totally sexually free environment, to a female commune involving some lesbians, to an rigidly moralistic atmosphere opposing the occurrence of sex except as a procreative activity (10%). Two trends are noteworthy yet they are in a sense mutually contradictory. One was (our impression) that there was somewhat more sexual experimentations than in traditional nuclear families; group sex, switching of partners, extra marital relationships, all seemed to occur more frequently than in the general population of the same age. This of course may say as much for availability and opportunity as for basic values and attitudes. Notwithstanding this initial trend towards experimentation and change, we saw an opposing thrust or reversion towards monogomy, possessiveness and traditional sexual relationships in the communes themselves (see below). Still another area that invites initial proclamations and plans for liberalism and innovation involves the use of drugs. And like sex and privacy, there is a fairly rapid reversion to a fairly straight model. With the exception of the religious communes where all drugs are taboo, and a couple of reaky or unrealistic houses where any drugs go, the vast majority (83%) of the urban communes restricted their drug use to marijuana

and hashish, with very occasional use of LSD. Speed users were evicted because of the difficulties in living with a speed freak; similarly, narcotics were not tolerated at all.

Variation among the different urban communes was at its peak when one examined how decisions were made, and how conflicts were resolved. Both of these areas necessitated at least some dialogue, and formal or informal meetings. They differed in the formality versus informality of the meetings, their regularity, the extent of participation, and the content or subject matter discussed, but these did not seem to bear any relationship to the stability or longevity of the individual communes. That is, some stable ones had frequent formal meetings while others equally as stable had few; the same holds true for the unstable communes studied. Some had daily meetings, others bi-weekly, and still others unscheduled. Meetings lasted from a half hour in some, to a few hours in others. In general, the meetings took one of two forms: they were either administrative in nature, or personal. The former dealt with issues like division of labour, costs to be shared, communal purchases and the like, while the latter focussed on interpersonal relationships and conflict situations, and overlap inevitably occurred. Some of the communes had formal and regular psychotherapy sessions (gestalt, encounter, synanon-like etc.), while others held this type on an informal, as-needed basis. At times an outside leader or therapist was brought in. A few of the communes shunned any formal meetings, but tried to use the evening mealtimes as a congenial forum for discussion of issues. In the religious or highly political urban communes ideological meetings, rituals, and ceremonies were held regularly. One important aspect of the urban communes we studied was the gradual (sometimes rapid) evolution of a hierarchy and one or two leaders among the communalists. These individuals were often the initial organizers and prime movers of the commune. They also tended to serve as stabilizers and counsellors to the rest of the group. In many cases (50%) they were a couple, occasionally a male and female not together; usually they were among the older members. The leaders were especially important in times of stress, when squabbling between intracommunal

alignments became most manifest - they acted as buffers, pacifiers, therapists, even policemen. They were also ideological leaders in that they often charted new directions for the commune, initiated constructive dialogue or action, and seemed to have the communal interest at heart. The communes which were religious in nature had a built-in authoritarian hierarchy; clear leaders or elders were designated and acknowledged by all. In only a couple of communes studied was there resentment by some of the members that one or two had the recognition and esteem of leaders. The total absence of leaders seems to be no worse than too many leaders as far as the stability of the commune is concerned.

Sudden unexpected changes in the membership composition wrought havoc on the individual communes. Some of the communes (27%) had a stable population for as long as a couple of years or more, but many others were subject to frequent changes. This was particularly marked in the draft dodger communes, especially in their earlier years when the sudden and unexpected arrival of new members caused major personal and communal upheavals.[14] The departure of a member(s) who had been an integral part of the "team" always left a void and changed the dynamics of the group. When this experience occurred due to a conflict situation, the results were even more upsetting. The house ceased to function smoothly and there were residual hard feelings for a while, until the group was able to integrate the change and adapt to a very different situation. Members left for a variety of reasons including "fed up with this life", "kicked out for pushing drugs or ripping off members", "not growing any more", "too many hassles", etc. When the separation of couples, married or not, occurred in the communal environment one of the couple usually left, and these instances were particularly upsetting to the communal group, this appeared to be a relatively frequent occurrence. The arrival of new members (except in the case of the draft dodger communes) is usually much more easily coped with. There is often a "need" for a new member, and frequently formal or informal screening has already occurred. The new member may have visited before, been a friend of one of the members, or have been "referred" from known sources. There are occasional screening

sensitivity sessions, or a prior discussion with the group at mealtimes or in a general meeting. Some of the communes make specific demands on the newcomer (ideology, habits, financial) while others are much less pecific or rigorous. The new members usually are model communalists to begin with since they are in the initial (subtle) probationary period and wish to please their new "family". The philosophies or raison d'etre of the various communes closely approximated the original motivations of the individuals for adopting this particular way of life. Yet one could find in a particular urban commune individuals who have joined for a variety of reasons all involved in a common cause or activity. Central themes which occurred in different communes were Women's Liberation, Socialism, Counter-culture, Religious, growth enhancement, the communal service or business (day care centre, health food store, leather shop, clinic, etc.), alternative to nuclear family, individual child rearing, and isolated existance.

Most (66%) of the communes studies had children (usually preschool age) living with one or both parents. In most cases they had their own rooms, occasionally shared with other children. Their were a number of themes which typified the adults' attitudes to their junior members, and certain phrases were heard repetitively: "kids should be treated like adults", ".....should be liberated", ".....should be out of public school", "..... should be communally raised". In fact the children in the urban communes most often still "belonged" to the natural parent(s) and felt that they did, even though they were being raised at the time in a larger family framework. In other instances the children were seen as children of the larger community and parents trying to minimize possessiveness or favouratism. This turned out to be very difficult to accomplish; there was often an internal split in the commune over child rearing attitudes, and this was in turn very confusing to the youngsters. If a child's parent feels that the child is "everybody's and nobody's", while another parent in the same commune feels very possessive towards her own child inevitable difficulties arise; the child is bombarded with contradictory messages.

In a few instances communes split on this account. To quote one adult communalist "you really have to be together on child rearing". There was a more innovative theoretical approach to the children - many planned to set up their own schools. The children in a couple of instances were allowed to experiment with marijuana, and in other situations were given adult responsibilities and indoctrination (especially antisocietal) - there is no doubt that they were an early politicized group. We noted that the children in the communes tended to be more relaxed with adult strangers, and less dependent on their biological mothers than children in nuclear families. In only a few instances the children were all but ignored by the adult members; in the majority, there was warmth, concern, and dedication to the children. The women in many of the urban communes studied tended to be noticeably stronger and more independent than traditional societal expectations of them. Many were deeply involved either actively or philosophically in the Women's Liberation movement. As a matter of fact a considerable proportion of the disagreements in some communes had specifically to do with masculine versus feminine roles and jobs. Many of the women refused to allow themselves to be treated as "sex objects", and rejected any attempt to assign to them the domestic chores, for example, as a female job. While many of the communes experienced peaceful and happy times, when there was friction it tended to manifest itself in a number of recurrent areas. These areas have already been alluded to, and include disagreements on use of space, division of labour, mess, noise, infringement on one's privacy, use and sharing of money, child rearing practices, and sexuality. In addition external influences like multiple or disproportionate visitors, members joining or quitting quickly and unexpectedly, and external harassment from the surrounding community occasionally had destructive influences on the commune. Probably most important, and underlying the manifestations in concrete terms, were personality conflicts and problems. Any single member with serious emotional problems or behavior that was antithetical to group cohesion (aggressiveness, disruption) could destroy a group unless he was excluded or changed. The former was what usually occurred, and this by mutual consent. A curious reciprocal

relationship devolved in that the greater the personality conflicts or personal problems, the greater was there a concentration on issues like privacy, neatness etc. Conversely, the less space in the commune, for example, the more personal unhappiness and interpersonal conflicts came to the fore.

DISCUSSION

It should come as no surprise that the majority of the members of the communes we studied were of middle class origins, young, and relatively well educated. It has often been this group from which innovation, revolution, and idealism has sprung. In many cases the communalists have stated that they reject the values of middle class society. They have been brought up in relatively affluent circumstances and the luxuries this affords - material possessions and the sense of freedom to experiment with new life styles. There was occasional conflict with a surrounding lower class neighbourhood - in these cases the communalists were demeaning the goals and aspirations of people who did not have their opportunities. The young are in an easier position to criticize, and even to act on that criticism because of fewer roots, less entrenchment of habits and patterns of living, fewer responsibilities, and a search for change and novelty. The commune may serve as a vehicle for identity resolution, for the psychosocial moratorium. It appears that the commune joiners as a group are less conventional, more "in search of themselves". Nowadays, instead of merely questioning the sactity of the nuclear family unit, they can actively participate in an alternative life style. Instead of being satisfied with finding fault with the status quo and the establishment, they are ready outlets for the expression of rebelliousness and quiet revolution.

But it is not only the very young who join communes; nor is it only those trying to wrestle with personal discontentment. The conscious reasons given for joining are many and varied and, as usual, each individual represented multiple motives and these were always more complex than originally presented. A dissatisfaction with the status quo seems to be a sine qua non for voluntarily joining this particular mode of living. Most of the individuals were searching for something "better" in terms of personal contentment, in addition to any political,

religious or any other goal that was voiced. If the major reason for joining an urban commune is in the area of emotional problems, not only is there little resolution of these problems, but the effect on the smooth functioning of the group is a negative one. The only exceptions to this are those communes that are specifically set up for therapeutic purposes.

It must be reiterated that we have specifically looked at communes existing under one roof. This immediately adds a host of potential problem areas that might be obviated in separate dwellings. Issues like space, privacy, noise, mess, can become sources of considerable friction. It became necessary in most of the communes we studied to strike a balance between members' needs for their own territory, privacy and life space on the one hand, and group participation, interaction and affectional ties on the other. Few went into a commune without expecting and indeed desiring considerable support and involvement with the group milieu. The issue of privacy, however, was not sufficiently considered in many cases prior to joining, and if insufficient space prevented modifications in the physical environment inevitable problems arose. In addition to private bedrooms, communal kitchen and living room, the most ideal houses provided for rooms to "do one's thing", be it recreational, studying, entertaining, without infringing upon the needs of others. For obvious reasons, warm seasons and climates make space somewhat less of a problem, since the outside often serves as a safety valve and source of privacy. By the same token noise becomes much more of a source of friction when there is insufficient space for others to get away from it. Again, this is a group of individuals who have rejected a style of life that afforded them ample physical space and privacy, who have been brought up in situations where these things are taken for granted. It is perhaps inevitable to expect them to have difficulties in this area because of their backgrounds; it is our feeling, however, that this sense of privacy is as much a basic human need as are food and interpersonal affectional bonds.

Sharing, cooperation, compromise are all basic requirements living in

urban communes. Sharing permeated every facet of living communally, but members differed in their abilities and desires to truly live the communal life. Division of labour, money, food, etc., in addition to physical space, all demanded more than "goodwill" and honourable intentions. In all the communes, there appeared to be two major aspects of sharing that determined whether a house would function smoothly. One revolved around the individuals - their expectations, committment to the group, ability to live and act radically different from the dictates of their backgrounds. They had to give up the "frontier freedom" philosophy imbued in many of them, and reject competition and total independence as the sacred goals of living. Once having accomplished at least part of these demands on the personality, the second issue in sharing looms large. This has to do with organization, assignments, and well delineated tasks. Unless members know in advance what their assignment is, and what exactly are the expectations of the job, things tend to get put off, neglected or never done. Little annoyances can gnaw at members and become quite destructive to the communal milieu. One could often easily assess the quality or smooth functioning of an urban commune by the state of the physical environment. If dirt, clothes, dishes and other objects are allowed to collect throughout the house it is a safe bet that things are not going well. If the majority of members look haggard and tired, one can conclude with a high degree of accuracy that group cohesion is faulty. It is perhaps not surprising that work, money and food should take on such emotional meaning to members of urban communes. There is no doubt that these are central issues in most affluent North American homes from which most of the communalists spring. One member not pulling his or her weight was often sufficient to damage the groups' effectiveness and spirit. Merely rejecting a life style does not allow one to cut off all that he has been indoctrinated with. Consequently when things were not going well for whatever reason, this was often manifested in tension and arguments in these particular areas. It has also been suggested that the symbolic meaning of these specific areas make them more emotionally loaded for everyone in the house: food (oral gratification, nurturance),

money (anal retentiveness, possessiveness) and work (phallic mastery, competence) all serve as control foci for feelings. Conversely, when people are feeling good about themselves and each other, these issues seem to be integrated into a smooth pattern of cooperation and sharing.

We find it quite interesting that the wide variety in number and nature of house meetings did not appear to bear any direct relationship to how well or poorly a commune was operating. Some of the most self-destructive groups had frequent and personally intense meetings, but so did some very cohesive communes, and vice versa. Still others had therapeutic groups which seemed to go on repetitively and interminably. Rather than the quality or content of the meetings being important, it is our contention that <u>how</u> they were run was most crucial. This was probably effect rather than cause, but meetings, no matter what type, which illustrated mutual caring, respect, trust, and humor, took place in the most stable and happy groups. Whatever the arrangement, it did seem essential for members of the group to have some means and opportunity to deal with any kind of dissatisfaction or problem. While it has become a cliche, open communication between commune members was very important in maintaining group cohesion. As mentioned above the group meetings served many functions (social, administrative, decision-making, therapeutic), but in order for any of these goals to be attained, it became obvious that in addition to "good virations", <u>leaders</u> had to emerge. These individuals were usually not formally designated as such except in the religious communes studied, and in most instances became leaders by virtue of qualities, maturity, and sense of responsibility. It is interesting that these leaders assumed their positions almost in spite of themselves. There was no self-proclaimed or even subtle grab for power; they became leaders even if they didn't see themselves as such. This occurred even in an egalitarian, democratic, participatory atmosphere, and seemed to be <u>crucial</u> to the proper functioning of the commune. The leaders often functioned as the surrogate "parents" of the group.

Without good leadership the communes tended to flounder and suffer from frequent and unresolved crises. If it became a "power trip" or an attempt to lead for selfish aims, the results were often destructive; jealousies and competitions could arise and ill-feelings pervade the group.

It was the authors' clear impression that those without any modicum of ideology or group rational for living communally had the most difficult time of it. The philosophy often served a variety of functions. In addition to providing a purpose in life, it tended to defuse in many instances personality clashes; the stronger the ideological committment the less emphasis on issues of day-to-day living. The common external purpose or intense outer-directed belief system absorbed the energies of the members so that there was less concentration on inner conflict situations or interpersonal problems. If in addition to a shared philosophy there is a common activity that many of the house members are engaged in, a stronger bond seems to develop between them. Nihilism or negativism may serve to unite communalists spiritually but only temporarily; acting in concert to accomplish some goal (ecological, day care centre, newspaper, store) imbues the members with a sense of participation, of belonging, of being needed.

Still other important examples of early laissez-faire attitudes evolving into more restrictive, even conventional approaches are the areas of sexuality and drug use. As a result of curiosity, iconoclasm, and some unrealistic thinking it was originally felt in many instances that experimental sexual relations and free use of drugs were to be encouraged. Once again we see in many instances an initially intense effort to be "with it", not constrained by past edicts and old moral dictates, leading to a fairly conservative approach. As has been shown elsewhere, human beings even with the best intentions and living communally have not yet mastered a "free sex" mentality[7, 13]. The question remains whether this type of communal living is antithetical to a relatively permanent monogamous relationship. While there did appear to be reversion to this model, there is also no doubt that many couples split shortly after joining

the commun milieu. For one thing, partners' mutual dependancy needs are greatly reduced or at least diffused. More important, however, is the state of these relationships prior to joining the commune. Couples in trouble may be searching for a convenient "out" and the commune does afford this opportunity. Just as in a family, the splitting up of a couple destroys everybody's equilibrium for a while; the system has more trouble handling this one experience than any other single occurrence. It seems that changes like these can more easily be sustained if there is a stable nucleus of members that does not change. Mild drug use either was tolerated or accepted as a fact of life in most communes; hard drug use (narcotics, speed) was absolutely banned. It is interesting that drug use only seemed to be an important consideration when things were going poorly in the commune. When the group was cohesive and active, this issue was incidental or non-existant.

The area of child rearing was often the focus of intra-communal disagreement. For all the rhetoric and theoretical proclamations on child rearing, Spock seemed to prevail in the majority of instances. All the adults in the communes had been raised in fairly traditional families. Now it was their turn to be parents, parent-surrogates, or part of the extended family. It seemed that they wanted to ensure that their children would not suffer from the same mistakes made by their parents. It is difficult to shake the work of generations in one fell swoop; attempts at raising the children exclusively communally (as opposed to parentally) were by and large failures. There was frequently an early return to feelings of possessiveness, competition and favouratism, even among the non-parents. When the attempt to utilize communal methods was pursued there was frequent disagreement as to the "right" course to follow: internal consistency no longer depended on only two parents, but rather on six to ten or more adults having responsibility for the child. In none of the urban communes did we find as highly organized a child rearing scheme as in the Israeli Kibbutz, for example, where a special worker (Metapelet) has major responsibility for the children when they are not with their own parents. Yet the children seemed to be thriving in the more successful communes. They were healthy, happy, independent. And there was an extended family of other children and adults. Some communalists

felt that communal existance without children is a shame, like comparing a family with kids to a childless couple. There is no doubt that those communes with children tended to be more committed to the concept and philosophy of this life style, and more serious about the commune as a relatively permanent alternative to the isolated nuclear family.

How does one measure the extent of success or failure of an urban commune? There are a number of criteria, not all of them applicable to our particular study. For example longevity is one important aspect, but like a long standing bad marriage it doesn't tell you much in itself. Most of the communes we looked at were over a year in existance, which is actually an extremely short time; there is an initial "honeymoon period" when everything appears rosy. Group cohesion is another intrinsically important criterion - this refers to the manner in which the group members interact, relate to each other, do things together, share, communicate, respect each other - how they function as a group. Another parameter is individual satisfaction - a sense of belonging, self esteem, a diminishment in internal feelings of anxiety, depression. We could also ask whether the motivations given for originally joining the commune were satisfied; is personal growth achieved? Is group growth realised? The frequency, intensity, and subject matter of interpersonal disagreements, and how they are resolved are important. The stability of a commune, the frequency of changes in composition and direction are good indications of how a commune is functioning. The "spirit", sense of happiness do not lend themselves to measurement, but are readily available upon observation, interview, and participation. Do the individual members feel that it is a good experience, do they want to commit themselves and loved ones to this life style indefinitely? In our terms a successful commune combines enough of these criteria for us to consider it a positive experience. It often astounded us how we could walk into a commune and "feel" the atmosphere. In studying the thirty urban communes it became apparent that for a communal experience to be successful certain elements in the life situation are crucial (Table IV). Committment to the group is an important but rare commodity in the communes we looked at. The committment is both temporal (a sense of indefiniteness or

permanence) and personal (a sense of belonging, responsibility to others). A common ideology and sense of purpose seems to further group stability and deminish interpersonal conflict, especially when active involvement is the ethos. A priori planning is extremely important but this more often occurs with the older, more mature individuals. The physical setting of our particular commune (one roof) should allow abundant space for privacy. It goes without saying that sufficient funds for rent, food, recreation are necessary. A vital issue seems to be the degree of organization - while rigidity and authoritarianism may become self-defeating and destructive, some master plan, division of labour, management, is crucial to the proper functioning of the commune. Relying on members' "intrinsic good" to overcome friction borne out of conflicting personal needs is to us patently ridiculous; anarchistic communes just don't make it. A hierarchy, even if subtle and informal, helps maintain the stability of the commune. One or two leaders should emerge if the group is to continue functioning properly with a minimum of problems. The members should be somewhat realistic about what they are getting themselves into; expectations of a Utopian existance are just looking for trouble. By the same token unrealistic plans regarding sexuality, drugs, anarchism, are designed to foment trouble. Finally, it is perhaps obvious that the individual members should be well integrated and not suffering from undue emotional problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Who are these communalists? Why do these particular individuals join urban communes in 1971-2? What would they have done in 1960? Suffered in silence? In 1966? Marched and demonstrated? They are an educated, talented, and privileged group who are not conventional, not satisfied with their personal lives and contemporary society and left leaning. If these are tautalogical descriptive terms it is because we can be of no more precise than this. In many cases it is a matter of life's circumstances which determine whether one goes the communal route or not. It is no longer a difficult decision and move to make, particularly for a young, single person; the opportunities are obviously there.[3] For an individual already

living in a nuclear family with young children, adopting a radically different life style is a major decision. In either cases, individuals with similar values and situations tend to select each other as commune members. Aside from the specific areas of concern in this kind of living which we considered earlier, there is a much more basic issue at stake, and that is, just how seriously should we take this phenomenon? In an age of rapid changes and Future Shock it often becomes very difficult to prognosticate, to separate fad from fact.[21,22] What we note is that many of the problems of living communally under one roof, are no more (and no less) severe and unique than living in a large family in one house. And what we deem important for the stability and vitality of the communal group can easily be transferred to basic criteria for the success of the family group. Indeed, the urban commune can be visualized as a substitute family in some cases. There is no doubt that when it functions well the urban commune provides nurturance, support, a feeling of being needed and loved, but the same can be said for the family. Conversely, a commune undergoing difficulties can be destructive to the individual as well as the group, but so can a poorly functioning family. Even sharing, compromise, cooperation, sine qua nons of the commune, are vital ingredients in a cohesive, warm family. We ask ourselves if the added benefits accruing from living communally do not stem mainly from larger numbers rather than any other single parameter. There is no doubt that our highly mobile culture and low birth rate have combined to produce millions of small, isolated nuclear families, whereas years ago the extended family lived either together or in a close proximity. In addition to being able to fall back on one or other's experience in a slower changing world, they were more able to rely on each other for moral or other support. In our devotion to upward mobility, technological progress, material acquisition, we have all but destroyed a major advance for human stability and inner peace - this has been shown in our society[22], in Nigeria[12,22], and with the North American Indian.[13]

To us the commune serves as a warning that we must slow down and recapture some of the values that were so eagerly destroyed. It is interesting that while many of the communalists are consciously attempting to overcome the influence of

the family, their goals are not dissimilar from many family members, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rejecting isolated nuclear family life should not mean "throwing out the baby with the bathwater"; there does not have to be one Royal Road. A variety of intentional social systems [1] can and should be set up to accommodate those who find difficulty coping with the demands of traditional family life or of technological society. At present we do not see the urban communes in their current form as posing any "threat" to family life in America. Indeed, even if they were more widespread and successful there is no reason why "threat" even should enter into the discussion. They are better for some people, serve as a temporary stop for others, enable growth or an outlet for still others; they do not imply the inevitable demise of the nuclear family. If they point out deficiencies in our way of life then they will have already contributed to society. The single dwelling commune is extraordinarily difficult to perpetuate successfully; it is possible that multiple dwellings with communal facilities may be easier to sustain. We see these communes studies as a pioneering phase. It will take time to modify the education and experience of generations or even millenia. A détente will occur, the family will change for some, remain for others - but we will have learned that we need each other, that "making it alone" is not sacro sanct, even in America.

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TABLE I

ARBITRARY DEFINITION OF URBAN COMMUNE

(1) At least 6 adult members
(2) Non-consanguineous
(3) Both sexes
(4) Same city address
(5) One Roof
(6) Six months in existence
(7) Sharing (material, food, space, child rearing)

TABLE II

COMMUNALISTS - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Total Number	>300
Age	<20 = 25%, 20 - 29 = 70%, 30+ = 5%
Sex	Male - 55%, Female - 45%
Socio Economic (origin)	UC - 10%, MC - 75%, WC - 10%, LC - 5%
Education	High School - 85%, Pt. College - 55%, Degree - 15%, Grad School - 5%
Religious (origin)	P - 50%, RC - 30%, J - 20%
Citizenship	Canada - 50%, U. S. - 45%, Britain - 5%
Age of Commune	6 - 11 mo. = 25%, 1 - 2 yr. = 50%, >2 yr. = 25%
Number/Commune	6 - 8 = 10%, 9 - 12 = 60%, 13+ = 30%

TABLE III

MOTIVATION FOR JOINING COMMUNES

Political-Economic (Hatred of the system, anticapitalism, socialist commitment, women's lib, draft dodger)

Financial (Save money, monetary co-op)

Personal (Failure or pressures on nuclear family, isolation)

Self-Actualization (Learn about self, solve personal problems, improve relationships with others)

Religious (Yoga Asram, Christian, Process)

Experiential (Good trip, try sharing new life style, curiosity)

Common Task, Business, Service (Store, crafts, day care center, clinic)

TABLE IV

FACTORS PREDISPOSING TO SUCCESSFUL COMMUNES

A PRIORI PLANNING

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

SURRENDERING "FRONTIER FREEDOM"

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT - SPACE, PRIVACY

FUTURE ORIENTATION

SUFFICIENT MONEY

COMMITMENT TO THE GROUP

IDEOLOGY

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

STABLE COMPOSITION

ORGANIZATION

LEADERSHIP

OPEN COMMUNICATION, PROBLEM RESOLUTION PROTOCOL

REALISTIC SEXUALITY, DRUG USE

AGREEMENT ON CHILD REARING

"TOGETHER" PERSONALITIES